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UNCLAS HELSINKI 000056

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EB/ESC/TFS, S/CT, INL/C, EUR/PGI, EUR/ERA, L
TREASURY FOR TFFC, OFAC
JUSTICE FOR CRM/AFMLS

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED

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SUBJECT: Charge Meets with Finnish Legal Expert on Counter-Terrorism Issues

REF: A) 05 HELSINKI 1321

B) 05 HELSINKI 1290
C) 05 HELSINKI 1211

¶1. (SBU) Summary. Charge met with one of Finland's most senior officials on counter-terrorism, Marja Lehto, who recently was appointed to chair the Council of Europe's Committee of Experts on Terrorism. Lehto requested input for the Designators' Workshop to be held during Finland's presidency of the EU; applauded statements by State Department Legal Adviser John Bellinger, III; and noted that Finland was seeking changes to its legislation to provide for more effective and independent asset-freezing authority. End summary.

¶2. (U) On January 17, Charge met with Marja Lehto and Pekka Oinonen of the Unit for Public International Law at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Lehto, who heads the office, was appointed in November to chair the Council of Europe's Committee of Experts on Terrorism (Codexter) for 2006. She will also chair the meetings of the EU's Committee on Counter-terrorism (COTERR) during Finland's EU presidency (July-December 2006).

¶3. (U) Lehto confirmed that Finland would host a Designators Workshop to address terrorist financing and repeated an earlier offer for US input on the workshop agenda (per reftel A). (NOTE: Post welcomes Department feedback, which can be directed to the Terrorist Finance Coordinating Officer John Clarkson (ClarksonJC@State.gov). END NOTE.)

¶4. (SBU) Lehto noted that one of her priorities would be to explore ways to integrate human rights issues with counter-terrorism measures. She pointed out that these did not need to be competing issues. Rather she projected they could form complementary sides to terrorism prevention action plans. Lehto mentioned a new report from Martin Scheinin, the Finland-based UN Special Rapporteur charged with exploring the human rights/counterterrorism intersection; the report impressed her, and she plans to incorporate Scheinin's views into Codexter's work. (See reftels B and C for more background on Embassy's outreach with Scheinin.) Lehto also applauded statements made last September in San Remo, Italy, by State Department Legal Adviser John Bellinger, III, on the importance of human rights and international law to US foreign policy. The remarks, she reflected, were met with great enthusiasm, indicating the tremendous importance senior-level European audiences attach to US efforts to address human rights issues in anti-terrorism discussions.

¶5. (SBU) On terrorist financing, Lehto commented that a domestic inter-agency working group had been formed to examine ways to improve Finland's national asset freezing authority. Lehto shared her view that the group's findings may result in legislative changes granting greater independence to Finland's asset freezing authority, perhaps allowing the Government to freeze assets of EU-based individuals without regard to the status--or even existence--of an ongoing judicial investigation.

¶6. (SBU) Finally, Lehto commented on pending Finnish ratification of the US-EU extradition treaty. The agreement has been held up by Parliament's Legal Affairs Committee while it awaits "assurances" from the Foreign and Justice Ministries that alleged U.S. rendition flights through Finland did not violate Finland's constitution. Lehto said that while Finland was obligated, as an EU member, to ratify the treaty, Parliament had the constitutional authority to request such clarifications; however, she believed it highly unlikely that the treaty would be ultimately rejected.

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